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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Former State Employee Receives Jail Term for Theft

(Phoenix, Ariz. – Sept. 10, 2007) Attorney General Terry Goddard announced that Sonja Klaus, 34, of Mesa, was sentenced today to three months in the Maricopa County Jail for defrauding the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES).

Maricopa County Superior Court Commissioner Colleen French also sentenced the defendant to four years probation and ordered her to pay \$12,458 in restitution to DES. She was sentenced after pleading guilty to one count of theft, a felony charge.

In 2004, Klaus served as a DES Program Services Evaluator and developed a scheme to defraud DES of public assistance funds. After two DES clients voluntarily withdrew from the food stamp and cash assistance programs, Klaus kept their electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards and reactivated their cases. She used her employee status to gain access to the DES computer system and loaded the cases with food stamp and cash assistance benefits. She had new personal identification numbers (PINs) assigned to the EBT cards and used the cards for her personal shopping, eventually withdrawing over \$12,000 worth of benefits.

Klaus' conviction was the result of ongoing efforts by the Arizona Attorney General's Office and the DES Office of Internal Affairs to investigate and prosecute employees who defraud the department. Assistant Attorney General Robert Etzkorn prosecuted this case.

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